

NARA Strategic Plan

Strategic Directions

December 23, 2005 Review

I. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

MISSION

The National Archives and Records Administration serves American democracy by safeguarding and preserving the records of our Government, ensuring that the people can discover, use, and learn from this documentary heritage. We ensure continuing access to the essential documentation of the rights of American citizens and the actions of their government. We support democracy, promote civic education, and facilitate historical understanding of our national experience.

The mission of the National Archives and Records Administration is rooted in legislation codified under Title 44 of the United States Code. Therein resides the authority of the Archivist of the United States, as head of the National Archives and Records Administration, to provide guidance and assistance to Federal officials on the management of records, to determine the retention and disposition of records, to store records in centers from which agencies can retrieve them, and to take into archival facilities and Presidential libraries, for public use, records that are, in the language of Section 2107, "determined by the Archivist of the United States to have sufficient historical or other value to warrant their continued preservation by the United States Government."

As defined in Section 3301, these records are:

all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them.

Title 44 further specifies the kinds of records that Federal officials must create and preserve with NARA's guidance. Section 3101 stipulates that:

the head of each Federal agency shall make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency and designed to furnish the information necessary to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and of persons directly affected by the agency's activities.

Definitions in Section 2901 extend recordkeeping requirements to elements of the legislative and judicial branches, as well as executive branch agencies, and Section 2203 requires similarly that the President of the United States "assure that the activities, deliberations, decisions, and policies that reflect the performance of his constitutional, statutory, or other official or ceremonial duties are adequately documented."

Thus, NARA shares responsibility with Federal officials throughout the government for "adequacy of documentation"—for seeing that certain kinds of records are created, kept, and made accessible. In Title 44 NARA has an additional and unique role to file centrally and to publish Federal laws and administrative regulations, the President's official orders, and the structure, functions, and activities of Federal agencies through the daily *Federal Register*. In Section 2504 NARA, through the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, is authorized to make grants "for the collecting, describing, preserving, compiling, and publishing of documentary sources significant to the history of the United States," thus expanding its role to include non-Federal and non-government records. Finally, in Executive Order 12958, as amended, NARA, as administrator for the Information Security Oversight Office, plays a crucial role in promoting and enhancing the system that protects classified information while at the same time providing for an informed public by ensuring that the minimum information necessary to the interest of national security is classified and that information is declassified as soon as it no longer requires protection. All this we have summed up in a statement of mission that both reflects our statutory mandates and expresses our sense of their significance.

This statement acknowledges our statutory responsibility for the management of the records of the Federal Government. It also acknowledges our commitment to providing both Federal agencies and the public access to what sections 3101 and 3301 call "evidence" of "essential transactions" of the Federal Government. Furthermore, our mission statement recognizes that our mandated work also serves democracy, for the ability of the people to have access to the documentation of their rights and entitlements and to examine the records of their Government and the actions of their elected officials is the foundation of a democratic society. Documentation of the rights of citizens means material that enables them to establish their identities, protect their rights, and claim their entitlements. Documentation of the actions of Federal officials means material that enables them to explain past decisions, form future policy, and be accountable for consequences. Finally, our holdings tell the story of our nation, and we believe it is our mission to support the teaching, learning, and understanding of American History and Civics.

Government records take various forms, including:

- *written paper records,*
- *maps, drawings, and pictorial materials of documentary value,*
- *digital records generated in multiple formats by computers,*
- *artifacts as well as papers in Presidential library collections, and*
- *donated manuscripts, Federal Register publications, and other materials that help document rights and entitlements, Federal actions, and historical experience.*

NARA alone is the archives of the Government of the United States, responsible for safeguarding records of all three branches of the Federal Government. Our mandate is unique. Also unique is our ability to use the records in our holdings to educate and facilitate understanding of the history of our country. Records document this history, as well as the rights and entitlements of individuals and also support the tenets of democracy that allow citizens to examine the actions of their government. Thus, included in our mission is the responsibility to share our holdings through programs that promote civic literacy and education. The records we hold belong to the public – our mission is to ensure the public can discover, use, and learn from the records of their Government.

VISION

As the nation's record keeper, it is our vision that every American will understand the vital role records play in a democracy, and their own personal stake in the National Archives. Our holdings and diverse programs will be available to more people than ever before through modern technology and dynamic partnerships. The stories of our nation and our people are told in the records and artifacts cared for in NARA facilities around the country. We want every American to be inspired to explore the records of their country.

At the National Archives, we preserve the past to protect the future. The records we hold are the original sources of the American Story, documenting the collective history of our nation through the actions of individuals. We see the soul of America in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. We see the passion of America in the arrest warrant of Susan B. Anthony, issued when she defiantly cast a ballot in the 1872 Presidential election. We see the genius of America in Thomas Edison's patent application for the light bulb. We see the great lessons of America in President Truman's executive order committing the Government to integrating the segregated military. Finally, we see the heart of America in the military records of the courageous men and women who served in the Armed Forces, and in the manifests of immigrant ships, recording the names of those who came to this country with dreams of a new life. These documents, like all the records in National Archives facilities across the country, are more than pieces of paper - they are pieces of history - and they belong to the people of this nation.

As the nation's recordkeeper, we will work to ensure that every American knows the role records play in a democracy and the personal stake they have in the National Archives.

STRATEGIC GOALS

- One:* As the Nation's recordkeeper, we will expand our leadership and services in managing the Government's records to help ensure the continuity and effective operations of Federal programs.
- Two:* We will preserve and process records for opening to the public as soon as legally possible.
- Three:* We will solve the challenges of electronic records in the Government.
- Four:* We will provide prompt, easy, and secure access to our holdings anywhere, anytime.
- Five:* We will increase civic literacy in America through our museum, public outreach, and education programs.
- Six:* We will equip NARA to meet the changing needs of our customers.

II. WHAT MUST WE DO TO GET THERE?

To achieve our strategic goals, we will pursue the strategies outlined below.

Strategic Goal 1: AS THE NATION'S RECORDKEEPER, WE WILL EXPAND OUR LEADERSHIP AND SERVICES IN MANAGING THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORDS TO HELP ENSURE THE CONTINUITY AND EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Strategic Overview

The heart of NARA's mission is a responsibility to provide leadership in records management to the Federal government. At the beginning of the 21st century, we recognized a need to redesign Federal records management strategies and techniques that were developed in the mid-20th century for paper records to address the way records are created and managed now. In response, we identified goals and devised strategies, tactics and measures of success that will prepare us for the records and information challenges of this century. Our three primary goals are to ensure that:

- *Federal agencies can economically and effectively create and manage records necessary to meet business needs;*
- *Records are kept long enough to protect rights and assure accountability; and*
- *Records of archival value are preserved and made available for future generations.*

This is the foundation on which the long-term success of NARA's mission depends. Promoting and ensuring effective records management across the Federal Government is the first building block to the rest of our Strategic Plan.

Building on our recent efforts, we must continue to make the link between effective records management and responsive, citizen-focused Government. We must continue to make the case that Government records are valuable assets and that effective records management is the tool for managing and protecting them. We must also aggressively pursue solutions to the management challenges of electronic records.

Recent disasters, both natural and man-made, have underscored the importance of records. In an instant, years' worth of vital records and irreplaceable information can be destroyed forever. Just as the nation's "First Responders" are prepared to assist in times of crisis, NARA will be prepared to assist with disaster preparedness and records recovery as "First Preservers." In a similar vein, NARA must be prepared to support Federal plans for Continuity of Government operations by obtaining and preserving essential documentation.

Our readiness to respond also includes preserving the *Federal Register* publication system, which generates legal records essential to the continuity of America's constitutional democracy. NARA will ensure that the *Federal Register* is published in times of crisis, in the face of all hazards, for as long as needed.

There is no question that the role of the nation's recordkeeper is one that is vital to the future of our nation, for without proactive records management we will lose the information that documents the daily work of our Government, and ultimately the history of our nation.

Specific Strategies for Records Management

- A. We will advocate records management in the agencies, especially at senior levels.
- B. We will provide records management guidance, training, and assistance throughout the government. We will be creative, collaborative, and proactive in doing this.
- C. We will work proactively with agencies to develop realistic schedules, including the identification of existing unscheduled electronic systems that have long term value.
- D. We will offer expanded records center services to efficiently and securely support agency recordkeeping needs.

Specific Strategies for Ensuring the Continuity of Operations

- E. We will be the First Preservers of government records in times of natural or man-made disasters.
- F. Our Federal Register will be ready at another location to support Federal plans for Continuity of Government operations on short notice.
- G. All NARA facilities will be prepared to function under continuity of operations plans on short notice.
- H. We will support the government in obtaining and preserving essential documentation related to a continuation-of-government event.
- I. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission will promote a sustainable national archival system through a program of grants to states for statewide services and sub-grants.
- J. We will ensure that all appropriate records are acquired and made available during Presidential and Congressional transitions and after.

Strategic Goal 2: WE WILL PRESERVE AND PROCESS RECORDS FOR OPENING TO THE PUBLIC AS SOON AS LEGALLY POSSIBLE

Strategic Overview

In a democracy, the records of the Government belong to its citizens, and providing access to them is a vital service. After the Federal agencies have identified their archival records, NARA gathers, stores, preserves, and processes them. Our holdings can not be made available to the public if we do not invest in the archival processing and preservation of records in our custody; therefore, our goals for access are impossible to achieve without the prioritization and the requisite resources to do these tasks.

Archival processing involves all the steps needed to open a record to the public. It includes establishing basic intellectual control, review of the records for sensitivities and classification, arrangement, description, and preservation. New technology has created and will continue to create increased opportunities for easier and faster access to our holdings, but until records are processed, they cannot be used by the public. The Presidential Libraries holdings are one example of collections that have a large public demand and complex processing requirements. This means that processing requires an unusual amount of labor, and is complicated by the fact that each recent administration has produced an enormous increase in the number of records compared to its predecessor. Currently, NARA has a significant backlog of both Federal and Presidential holdings, including classified records, to be processed. In addition, new records are being accessioned faster than they can be processed.

In order to make our holdings accessible to the public, we will obtain new resources to support the processing of records. We will seek out and develop partnerships to assist in this effort, and will realign our business systems and processes when appropriate. The expected result is a considerable increase in records that are available.

Our archival processing efforts must go hand-in-hand with investments in the preservation, appropriate storage, and security of the records and artifacts in our custody. Our holdings include photographs, film, video and audio tape, furniture, paintings, and original manuscripts, as well as fragile paper documents. It is our responsibility to ensure that items such as these – as well as our more famous holdings like the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights – undergo the appropriate preservation steps and are stored safely and securely so that they are available to future generations.

Very few people realize that the records they use in our research rooms or through our web site are there because archivists have inspected them, given special preservation treatment to them when needed, stored them in acid-free containers, and housed them in space that will protect them from temperature and humidity changes, as well as from fire, flood, and theft. We must continue to focus on preparing appropriate archival space for both our present and future holdings by upgrading our existing facilities and planning for future facilities. Changing and increasing threats and vulnerabilities have and will continue to require improved security measures for our holdings, staff, and infrastructure. We have already installed security cameras in our research rooms, and will continue to refine our security measures to guard our holdings, while still maintaining the open access that our mission inherently dictates.

Specific Strategies for Accessioning and Processing Records for Access by the Public

- A. We will eliminate the current backlog of unprocessed holdings, both Federal and Presidential, understanding that legal restrictions may still prevent public access to some of the holdings.
- B. We will eliminate the backlog of classified holdings eligible for review.
- C. We will ensure that records to be accessioned into the National Archives arrive on time, properly documented, and in accordance with our standards.
- D. We will describe all of our holdings at a level and quality appropriate to their use, understanding that these descriptions are the key to subsequent access.
- E. We will expeditiously process our holdings for opening to the public as soon as legally possible.
- F. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission will increase nationwide public access to historical records by awarding grants for access and preservation projects.
- G. We will represent within the Government the public interest in seeing that material is not classified or otherwise closed unnecessarily or longer than necessary.

Specific Strategies for Storage, Preservation, and Collections Security

- H. We will ensure that we have appropriate space for all our archival and Records Center holdings, whether they be artifacts, electronic files, paper records, or other.
- I. We will ensure that future Presidential libraries meet standards that will make them usable and sustainable into the future.
- J. We will meet the preservation needs of our holdings, whether they be artifacts, electronic files, paper records, or other.
- K. We will evaluate, manage, and track our records effectively and efficiently, from scheduling and accessioning through processing, storage, preservation, and use.
- L. We will proactively adapt our security measures for our staff, holdings, and infrastructure to meet changing threats and vulnerabilities.

Strategic Goal 3: WE WILL SOLVE THE CHALLENGES OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS IN THE GOVERNMENT***Strategic Overview***

For many years, the mission of the National Archives involved preserving the paper records that have been created over more than two centuries of our nation's government. Now, however, we face the challenge of preserving the records of the present and future, which are overwhelmingly electronic. Simply put, the volume of electronic records is expected to increase exponentially in the coming decade, and having the ability to find, manage, use, share, and dispose of electronic records is vital for the efficient and effective functioning of the Federal Government.

Across the entire Federal Government, there is one prominent trend that is creating both challenges and opportunities for the National Archives to assess and improve how it conducts its business -- the increasing dependency of the U.S. Government on information and networking technology to execute governmental functions. This transformation of government, also known as "e-government," has resulted not only in the development and use of new tools to conduct business, the creation of records in new and varied formats, but also in the transformation of the way public business is carried out.

This trend has important implications for the lifecycle management of records. They create a situation of inherent tension for the National Archives. On the one hand, the Government needs us to provide direction in this changing and uncharted landscape, and we must to update our services for both the Government and the public to deal with electronic records. On the other hand, we must recognize that information technology is dynamic, and there is no predictable end to the evolution of the technology we use or in the characteristics of electronic records. In order to successfully meet the needs of both Government and the public, the National Archives must continue to adapt and expand its services as the shift to e-government continues.

Our primary response to the challenge of authentically preserving electronic records free of specific hardware and software and providing access to these records in the future is the Electronic Records Archives (ERA). ERA will give us the means to preserve and provide sustained access to Federal Government electronic records of archival value and to provide economical storage and retrieval services for electronic records that remain under the legal control of the originating agencies. The goal of the ERA program is to enable NARA to preserve and provide access to electronic records created anywhere in the Federal Government. ERA will provide a comprehensive, systematic, and dynamic means of preserving and providing continuing access to authentic electronic records over time.

In addition, the National Archives will develop new standards to speed the transfer of electronic records to ERA, and ERA will stimulate advances in technology available to both the public and private sectors. Finally, we will continue to work closely with many partners to ensure that this technology is scaleable for use by state and local governments, the private sector, and other institutions with a need to preserve electronic records over time.

Specific Strategies

- A. We will deploy the Electronic Records Archive to capture, preserve, describe, provide access to, and appropriately dispose of Government electronic records.
- B. We will expand our expertise in the capture, preservation, and access of digital records.

- C. We will partner with agencies, researchers, and private industry to develop, implement, and manage our electronic records programs.
- D. We will provide functional requirements, guidance, and tools for building a records management capability into agency computer systems.
- E. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission will award grants to support the management and preservation of electronic records. In addition, knowledge gained by these projects supports the ERA.
- F. We will develop the capability to manage Federal agency electronic records within the NARA Federal Records Center program.
- G. Prior to transitioning to ERA, we will ensure continuous access to our electronic holdings, Presidential records in particular.

Strategic Goal 4: WE WILL PROVIDE PROMPT, EASY, AND SECURE ACCESS TO OUR HOLDINGS ANYWHERE, ANYTIME***Strategic Overview***

In the decades to come, the expectation of easy online access to our holdings will grow. The breadth of information available on the Internet has increased the demands of the public for access to more information faster than could even be thought possible just a decade ago. Research is no longer relegated to libraries and research rooms, but is being done around-the-clock on computers around the world. To support this new appetite for information, we will create, to the greatest extent possible, an “archives without walls.”

We will work to provide online access to the documents in our core collections, as these records are among those most requested by researchers. Additionally, we will put searchable descriptions of all records online with clear directions for how the original records may be located and used. While the public ideally wants instant access to the specific information they seek, most research work done with National Archives holdings is not that clear cut, and one disadvantage to online research is that less one-on-one personal assistance is available. To alleviate this obstacle, we will develop online tools to assist researchers.

We will expand online access, even as we acknowledge that legal, physical, and conceptual barrier will keep many of our holdings outside of cyberspace. Even working with partners, we cannot complete the task of universal Internet access to all declassified records in a single decade. Moreover, records such as maps and large drawings are too big to view well on a computer screen. We also have thousands of artifacts—such as Air Force One at the Reagan Library – that can only be appreciated in person. Lastly, some records come into our care with conditions that limit their use, including classified documents, some Presidential records, and some donated collections.

Some researchers need to delve deeper into records than our online collections will allow. We will continue to support them with research rooms and expert archivists, and will equip these facilities with the tools to help researchers locate records at any National Archives facility. At the same time we must reinvent the traditional role of our research archivists and equip them with the skills they need to work in an online world. For example, when researchers interact with our archivists online, their exchanges can be saved, indexed, searched, and re-used, thereby multiplying the archivists’ reach.

The Internet has introduced countless researchers to the holdings of the National Archives. This insatiable thirst for online access to information is exciting, as it brings more and more people to our virtual doors, yet the task of building an “archives without walls” is daunting. Our strategies in this area will focus on developing dynamic partnerships to digitize and deliver our most popular holdings and create tools to help researchers find the information they seek. By putting our country’s records literally at the fingertips of the public, we will be able to share our rich resources with more people than ever before.

Specific Strategies

- A. We will continuously re-envision the nature of archival research services to sustain a nationwide system of archival research with coordinated access to all the resources and staff expertise of the National Archives.
- B. For the broadest possible access, we will make our core collections available online.

- C. We will put guides, tutorials, and discovery tools online for both our online and offline holdings.
- D. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission will increase nationwide public access to historical records by awarding grants to publish, in microfilm, print, or online, important collections of records and papers.

Strategic Goal 5: WE WILL INCREASE CIVIC LITERACY IN AMERICA THROUGH OUR MUSEUM, PUBLIC OUTREACH, AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Strategic Overview

America's democracy is reborn – and reinterpreted – by each generation. For that work of renewal to go on, each generation must understand the basic ideas, forms, and values of the Government they inherit. It is with this understanding, this civic literacy, that the American people will be equipped to continue the evolution of our democracy, shaping our society for the future.

In the promotion of civic literacy, the National Archives plays a unique and important role. As the keeper of the records of the Government, we literally safeguard the facts of history. In a world where every blogger and political pundit has an opinion and their own version of events, we offer a factual foundation for the public conversation, whether the subject is the Constitution or the government papers of an individual nominated for a high office.

The holdings of the National Archives belong to the American public. From the Charters of Freedom, to the census records that enumerate our country's population, to the papers of Presidential Administrations, our holdings are so vast and diverse that the value and amount of information available is not always readily apparent to the public. To redress this, we must continually educate our customers about the treasure of information and services we offer.

We understand that our usefulness is directly related to our visibility. People must know what we are, what we do, and what we hold before they can benefit from our resources. We are committed to a major initiative in education – an initiative that embraces both the formal education system and the experiences of individuals who seek learning in exhibits, programs, and events.

We have seen the power of the Internet to bring like-minded people together for a common purpose. We will foster such online communities in our mission area, believing that through them we can multiply our effectiveness at promoting civic literacy. We likewise see our volunteers as a way to spread archival ideas and civic literacy, for they promote our mission among their friends and families, becoming a grass-roots corps of advocates for civic literacy.

The National Archives is not a single building in Washington, D.C. It is a nationwide network of regional archives, records centers, and Presidential Libraries and Museums. Along with our web site, these facilities provide access to records as well as workshops, seminars, exhibits, lectures, films, and special events, giving visitors all around the country unique interactive experiences. We will augment our programs through partnerships with institutions that can help us reach our goal even as they advance their own. Through our public outreach and education programs, we are committed to raising our nation's civic literacy and putting America in touch with the richness of history and the promise of the future.

Specific Strategies

- A. We will expand programs and resources to support teachers and students, creating a cadre of educators and researchers who use primary sources.
- B. We will promote the understanding of America's national experience through lifelong learning programs.
- C. We will provide places and tools for people to learn at our facilities.
- D. We will create exhibits that raise the profile of records, and the historical and civic understanding that is based on those records. We will raise the profile by expanding audiences, achieving public notice, reaching new communities, and engaging opinion leaders.
- E. We will create programs that raise the profile of records, and the historical and civic understanding that is based on those records. We will raise the profile by expanding audiences, achieving public notice, reaching new communities, and engaging opinion leaders.
- F. Through our web sites and our societies of volunteers, we will foster communities of people interested in archival records and their bearing on civic literacy.
- G. We will expand our web presence to increase electronic access to our exhibits and educational programs.
- H. We will partner with industry, national, and international institutions, and affiliated archives to develop cooperative initiatives that showcase NARA holdings, promote civic literacy, and highlight the importance of records.
- I. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission will promote the use of some of the most important records and papers in American history by supporting their publication in scholarly editions (print and electronic) that are used in classrooms, histories and biographies, documentary films, and exhibits.

Strategic Goal 6: WE WILL EQUIP NARA TO MEET THE CHANGING NEEDS OF OUR CUSTOMERS***Strategic Overview***

In this plan, we commit ourselves to expanding records management services to the Federal community and solving the challenges of electronic records in government. We also pledge to make more of our holdings available for examination by the public, create new and dynamic ways for researchers to access our holdings, and bring more of the American Story to life through our museum, outreach, and education programs.

These are bold commitments, and to fulfill them will require bold thinking and bold ideas. As individual managers and employees, each of us must challenge ourselves – and each other – to think proactively about emerging challenges and opportunities, apply new approaches to old problems, and seek out ways to improve and streamline our business processes. And collectively, we must establish ourselves as an organization that seeks excellence, encourages flexibility, and always puts the customer first. It is not enough to make a plan – we must create the staff, culture, and technological infrastructure to support that plan.

First and foremost, we must ensure that everyone in NARA understands what is envisioned in this plan and how each of us can contribute to making the plan a reality. This includes not only our regular workforce, but also the countless students, volunteers, contractors, and other partners who contribute their time and energy to NARA facilities across the country. For all of these staff, we must create an environment where individuals feel connected to the mission and vision of the agency and valued for the contributions they make. In addition, we must ensure that each of us in NARA understands who our customers are, and what our customers expect from us. Each of us serves a customer, whether we are providing records management support to Federal agencies, preserving documents, locating service records for veterans, maintaining our IT systems and networks, awarding grants, or processing budget or personnel actions. These customers must always be our first thought – never an afterthought.

Moreover, we must continually adapt our policies, practices, and procedures to provide the best possible value and service to our customers. In an environment where change is the rule rather than the exception, we cannot assume that the way we conduct business today will be the way we conduct business tomorrow. We must work with our customers to identify their changing needs and develop creative, innovative solutions. In particular, we must be attentive to our customers' information technology requirements, and ensure that NARA's information technology infrastructure is optimized to support those requirements.

Specific Strategies

- A. We will identify and implement the cultural changes that we need to better serve our customers in a changing environment.
- B. We will ask each employee to define his or her job in terms of the customers they serve.
- C. We will ensure that staff have the skills, competencies, training, and tools they need to support their customers in a changing environment.
- D. We will ensure that every employee understands the mission and goals of the agency
- E. We will recruit and develop a diverse workforce so we can better serve a diverse public.
- F. We will encourage and reward excellence, flexibility, creativity, and innovation.
- G. We will encourage productivity by making our centralized systems and processes more efficient.
- H. We will expand our partnerships with the professional communities who share our goals and mission.
- I. We will expand our corps of volunteers and the roles they play in helping us serve our customers.
- J. We will make sure that each employee understands his or her opportunities to advance within the organization.
- K. We will involve employees in defining the best practices for their unit.
- L. We will support an information technology operation that thrives on nimbleness and serving customers, both internal and external.